



The Plummer Family and Slavery in Maryland

“As I listened from childhood to the story of my parents, eldest sister, and brother – (of their suffering and sorrow, their fear and anxiety, their loneliness, failure and disappointment, their doubt, darkness and torment) that the Sin of Slavery had caused them, I have ‘desired with desire’ to write it, that others, though discouraged from a different cause, might prove faithful by doing right, and thus overcome.”¹

- Nellie Arnold Plummer, Preface, *Out of the Depths or the Triumph of the Cross*

For more than two centuries, the wretched stench of slavery polluted the southern states of the United States. . . Maryland was not a stranger to the institution of slavery; rather, like most southern states, it relied on black African slave labor to build much of its economy. Nellie Arnold Plummer’s *Out of the Depths or The Triumph of the Cross* is a primary account of slave life in Maryland. The book is based on the diary of her father, Adam Francis Plummer, who was a slave from Prince George’s County, Maryland. The book includes excerpts from her father’s diary (May 30, 1841 – December 13, 1905). *Out of the Depths* cites family letters written by Nellie Plummer’s parents and sister, Emily Saunders Plummer, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Adam Plummer was a slave in Maryland from 1829 until 1864. He was owned by the well-known and aristocratic Calvert family. Dr. Leigh Ryan, director of the Writing Center at the University of Maryland, referred to Adam Plummer’s diary as a gold mine. Ryan says

¹ Nellie Arnold Plummer, *Out of the depths or the triumph of the cross* (New York: G.K. Hall & CO., 1997), xv.



“while slave narratives are often treated with skepticism because they are told through a second party... we can read his own words talking about his experience.”²

The purpose of this paper is to describe the institution of slavery in Maryland that shaped the life of the Plummer family. Although the paper will begin with a brief history of the Plummer family and will refer to the family’s experiences throughout, the majority of the paper is devoted to providing a general overview of slavery in Maryland. Since the Plummer family resided in Prince George’s County, a considerable amount of emphasis will be placed on slavery in the county. The paper will address the following subjects: (1) the Causes of slavery in Maryland. (2) Slavery in northern and southern Maryland and the Eastern Shore. (3) Slavery in Prince George’s County. (4) The anti-slavery movement and free blacks in Maryland. (5) The impact of the Civil War, Emancipation, and Reconstruction on Maryland.

I. A History of the Plummer Family

Cupid Plummer, a slave in Prince George’s County, is the first documented person in the lineage of the Plummer family. Cupid Plummer was born around 1720 (no definite date). During the American Revolutionary War, he enlisted in the 2nd Regiment of foot soldiers, commanded by Colonel Thomas Price, in 1778. Slaves were promised freedom if they joined the American army during the Revolutionary War. On May 27, 1781,

² Julia Oliver, “Retracing Plummer Roots,” *Gazette Community News*, June 28, 2001, sec. A.



Cupid Plummer was discharged from military service and granted his freedom. Plummer remained in Prince George's County and raised his family.³

According to the census of 1790, Cupid Plummer was a free man living in a household of six persons that included his wife, two daughters, and two sons. Adam Francis Plummer was the third son of Cupid's son Barney Plummer. Adam Francis Plummer was born May 14, 1819 at Goodwood, Prince George's County, Maryland. Goodwood was a large plantation that was owned by George H. Calvert (Lord Baltimore). At the age of ten, Adam Francis Plummer moved with the Calvert family to the "Riversdale" plantation. In *Out of the Depths or The Triumph of the Cross*, Nellie Arnold Plummer describes her father as an honorable man who never smoked or drank. Adam Francis Plummer did not commit any known crime with the exception of learning to read and write.⁴ John Bowser, a former slave and preacher, secretly taught Adam Francis Plummer how to read and write. Adam took full advantage of his literacy and, subsequently, did his best to educate his children and other family members.

On May 30, 1841, Adam Francis Plummer married Emily Saunders at the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC. Emily Saunders was the daughter of Nellie Orne Saunders, who was of mixed parentage. Her mother was an English indentured servant and her father was a black slave. Slavery divided many black families in Maryland and Adam and his wife were an example of how slavery divided the

³ Bianca Floyd, *Black History Project Resource Guide*, (Prince George's County, MD: Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, 1988-1990), 23.

⁴ Plummer, 12.



Plummer family. Adam remained in Riversdale while Emily Saunders Plummer lived on a plantation called “Three Sisters.” This plantation was located in Lanham, Maryland. Initially Adam and Emily Plummer were only permitted to see each other on the weekends. Whenever possible, Adam would walk eight miles to visit Emily from Saturday evening until Monday. He was required to return to the plantation in order to start work early each Monday morning. The Plummer’s first child, Sarah Miranda Plummer, was born on February 26, 1842. The second child, Henry Vinton, was born on July 31, 1848. The third child, Julia Ann, was born on March 18, 1849...Nellie Arnold Plummer was born in 1852

On December 22, 1855, Adam’s wife and children were sold in an auction to Gilbert Thompson who lived in a mansion on Meridian Hill in Washington, DC, fifteen miles from the Calvert Plantation in Riversdale. Emily Saunders Plummer would later be sold to a plantation (Mount Hebron) in Howard County, twenty miles southwest of Baltimore. As a result of the move, Adam was only able to visit his wife and children during Christmas and Easter.⁵ The Plummers were separated from each other for the first twenty-two years of their marriage. In 1868, Adam Francis Plummer purchased ten acres of land near Riversdale for one thousand dollars. In 1870, he finished building the family’s first home.⁶

⁵ *Ibid.*, XXI-XXII

⁶ *Ibid.*, XXII

II. Causes of Slavery in Maryland

Tobacco production was the root cause of slavery in Maryland. Following the conclusion of the war between the Dutch and the French (King William's War) in 1697, sugar prices dropped giving the advantage to tobacco investment. As a result, the Chesapeake area (Maryland and Virginia) became a profitable area for Europe.⁷ Tobacco production in Maryland increased between the 1620s and the 1680s but tobacco prices dropped off for a period of time and then recovered in 1710. During the ensuing period of prosperity, tobacco exports rose from thirty million pounds in the 1720s to 100 million pounds by the 1770s. Maryland's aristocracy benefited the most from tobacco sales. Maryland's elite enlarged the size of their slaveholdings as well as their share of all slaves. In 1733, less than ten percent of slaveholders held forty-three percent of all black bondsmen in Charles and Prince George's counties.⁸

A large labor force was required to grow the tobacco. Initially, Maryland planters depended on white indentured servants who migrated to Maryland from Europe. Indentured servants labored for a defined amount of time before they received their freedom. Often former servants, who remained in Maryland, would continue growing tobacco as free laborers, tenant farmers, sharecroppers, or small landowning planters.⁹

⁷ Robert J. Brugger, *Maryland: A Middle Temperament, 1634-1980* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 46.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁹ Russell R. Menard, *Economy and Society in Early Colonial Maryland* (Burlington: Ashgate, 1985), 214.



In 1698, Parliament abolished the Royal African Company monopoly thus opening up the international slave trade. An increase in the farm price of Maryland tobacco between 1697 and 1702 enabled larger planters to purchase slaves. Maryland port records show the attraction for slave labor. In October 1695, a “parcel” of 160 slaves landed. The next year the ship sailed into Annapolis with 175 slaves. In 1698, during the summer alone, 470 slaves were imported.¹⁰

During the last quarter of the seventeenth century, slave labor replaced indentured servitude. Tobacco production required a large labor force throughout the year; thus, slavery became a profitable business for Maryland’s economy.¹¹ Slaves were personal property and were listed and appraised, along with other possessions in the inventory taken shortly after a slave owner’s death.¹² In Maryland, tobacco was (1) sowed in February, (2) transplanted in June, (3) harvested in late August and September, (4) hung and cured for a month, and (5) finally packed. During the harvest season, a slave was called up at daybreak, driven out to the field and made to work until noon. Slaves received less than an hour for dinner. Slaves then worked until dusk and, after dark, they stripped the tobacco when it was ready.¹³

¹⁰ Brugger, 46.

¹¹ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the 19th Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 5.

¹² Menard, 273.

¹³ Allen Lee Kulikoff, “Tobacco and Slaves: Population, Economy and Society in 18th Century Prince George’s County, Maryland” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1976), 233.



Tobacco prices fluctuated between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁴ Periods of high demand led Maryland planters to buy more slaves to produce a larger tobacco output. However, overproduction and economic depressions forced Maryland planters to diversify the state's economy and seek alternatives to tobacco and slavery. Consequently, Maryland's Eastern Shore replaced tobacco with cereal production. Northern Maryland became more industrial and less agricultural. New England vessels sailing towards the Caribbean found it profitable to stop in the Chesapeake for grain. Subsequently, the grain was traded in the West Indies where planters concentrated on profitable sugar production. These New England vessels also took wheat from Annapolis, Maryland and sold it to Boston, Salem, and Rhode Island seaports.¹⁵

As the center of tobacco production moved South and then West, tobacco production moved South and then West, and tobacco became less significant in Maryland's economy. Tobacco fell from ninety percent of Maryland's agricultural production in 1747 to fourteen percent in 1859.¹⁶ Falling tobacco prices, industrial growth, the civil war, and abolition would eventually lead to slavery's death in Maryland. Despite the introduction of free labor and industry, slavery would always leave a deep mark on Maryland's history, particularly in the areas of Southern Maryland and the Eastern Shore.

¹⁴ Menard, 209.

¹⁵ Brugger, 63.

¹⁶ Fields, 5.

III. Slavery in Maryland

Until the 1680s, Maryland planters who could afford slaves were far more likely to rely on white English indentured servants for labor. For much of the seventeenth century, the status of blacks was ambiguous. The majority of blacks were not indentured servants or laborers. As the century wore on, blacks were treated less like men and more like commodities.¹⁷

A law of 1663 recognized that black service usually was perpetual. It scheduled punishments for English servants who ran away with blacks. An act in 1664 ruled that all blacks who arrived in Maryland after that year were servants. According to this law, all blacks were considered slaves, unless they could prove that they were contracted laborers for a defined period of time.¹⁸ Before such laws were in place, white Maryland residents presumed blacks to be inferior. Maryland citizens were influenced by English lore that described them as “brutes”. In the 1660s, Maryland passed laws banning miscegenation. The 1664 act discouraged interracial marriages.

Slavery was more expensive for Maryland planters than indentured servitude. Slavery’s upside was the fact that it guaranteed lifetime laborers and could also produce offspring which would provide future labor. Maryland planters who preferred white indentured servants faced several challenges. In the spring of 1689, the Dutch went to war with the French, a conflict that made Atlantic crossings hazardous, depressed tobacco

¹⁷ Brugger, 42-43.

¹⁸ Ibid., 43-44.



prices further, and retarded the flow of indentures. As more opportunities became available for young white men in Europe, fewer of them chose to enter into indentured servitude. The white men willing to come to America chose to serve in Pennsylvania and the Carolinas rather than Maryland.

By 1775, Maryland's slave population was 90,000, the second largest slave population in the British North American mainland colonies.¹⁹ Half of the slave population belonged to units of less than eleven individuals. The average slave in northern Maryland belonged to an owner of four slaves. On the Eastern Shore, most slave owners possessed eleven slaves. In Southern Maryland, the average number of slaves per owner was fifteen.²⁰

Maryland slaves dealt with the horrors of slavery in various ways. Some slaves relied on religion and culture to withstand slavery's harshness. Others resorted to violent means as was the case of Frederick Douglass who fought his master, Edward Covey, when he was a young man. Running away from plantations was a common form of resistance for many slaves in Maryland. Harriet Tubman, the leading conductor of the famous Underground Railroad which slaves used to travel from bondage to freedom in the north and Canada, was a slave from the Eastern Shore. Maryland had two types of runaway slaves: (1) slaves who joined family members and (2) slaves who attempted to pass as free in small port towns, find work, or leave Maryland.²¹

¹⁹ William L. Calderhead. "Slavery in Maryland in the Age of Revolution, 1775-1790." *Maryland Historical Magazine* 1 (Spring 2003): 34.

²⁰ Fields, 25.

²¹ Kulikoff, 226.



In 1845, Adam Francis Plummer and his wife planned to escape to Canada. Since it was unusual for a slave couple to have a legally recognized marriage, the Plummers used their marriage license as “free papers”. Unfortunately, their escape plans were foiled when one of Emily Saunders Plummer’s aunts told their plan to Sarah Ogle Hilleary, the mistress of Three Sisters. Emily was dismissed as a house servant and sent to work in the fields. As further punishment, Hilleary put Emily and her children up for sale in 1849. At the time Emily was ill and tending a newborn daughter. Fortunately, Emily was reprieved and her sister was sold in her stead.²²

Slavery differed depending on the geographic region in Maryland. Maryland can be divided into three geographic regions: (1) Northern Maryland which included Allegany, Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, Hartford, and Washington counties; (2) Southern Maryland which included Ann Arundel, Calvert, Charles, Prince George’s, Montgomery, and St. Mary’s counties; and (3) The Eastern Shore which included Caroline, Cecil, Dorchester, Kent, Queen Anne’s, Somerset, Talbot, and Worcester counties.

By 1850, sixty percent of Maryland’s residents lived in northern Maryland. The Eastern Shore had twenty-two percent of the state’s population and southern Maryland accounted for less than nineteen percent. By 1850, seventy percent of Maryland’s white population resided in northern Maryland. A major reason for this factor was due to Irish and German immigrants arriving in northern Maryland, in particular Baltimore, and white residents leaving southern Maryland and the Eastern Shore for job opportunities and

²² Julia Oliver, “Retracing Plummer Roots,” *Gazette Community News*, June 28, 2001, sec. A.



wealth. Between 1820 and 1850, 130,000 immigrants arrived in Baltimore, Maryland. By 1860, Baltimore held sixty eight percent of Maryland's foreign born population.

Baltimore played a major role in Maryland's economic growth and industrial progression. Baltimore's location as the southernmost of the major ports gave it an advantage in the West Indian trade as a whole. Commerce was the dominant element in Baltimore's economy and foreign trade was at the heart of commerce.²³ In 1808, the cotton textile industry began in Baltimore, Maryland. Commerce and shipbuilding played a role in this industry. Baltimore became the national center for the manufacture of the heavy duck cotton used in the construction of sails. Eventually, Baltimore developed a successful men's clothing industry, which by 1860 had a capital investment of \$1,218,500.²⁴

Baltimore's economic rise depended on slavery. Baltimore purchased many slaves from rural slave owners. Most Baltimore slaves worked as domestic laborers. Slaves were pulled into Baltimore during its rapid growth after 1780 because of the need for labor on the part of merchants, craftsmen, and manufacturers. Shipbuilders utilized more than thirty slaveholders. The shipbuilding industry enjoyed a peak period in early Baltimore. Shipbuilding construction was spurred by naval warfare, both to rebuild merchant vessels to replace those lost to warships and merchants following the war of 1812. Baltimore shipbuilders held twenty –five percent of their wealth in slaves.²⁵

²³ Fields, 42.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁵ T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1997), 8.



Baltimore, like much of northern Maryland, was in close proximity to Northern states such as New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware; consequently, its role in commerce, shipping, and immigration was less dependent on slave labor than other areas of the state. Forty percent of the Eastern Shore's population was black. Twenty percent of that population was slave. Slave labor was initially used for tobacco production in the Eastern Shore. By 1740, tobacco production on the shore declined to the point that citizens were objecting to paying public fees on tobacco. Cereal production would soon replace tobacco in the Eastern Shore. Unlike tobacco, which required a year round labor supply, cereal production only required a maximum work force at harvest. Although the Eastern Shore maintained a larger black population than northern Maryland, it shifted to a mixed agriculture economy and, consequently, decreased its reliance on slavery after 1800.²⁶

After 1815, Eastern Shore planters had to cut their work force. Slave owners began selling their slaves to the cotton producing planters of the southwest. As prices for Eastern Shore grains declined after the war of 1812 and planters scaled back production, hundreds of free blacks (thirteen percent of the population) migrated from the Eastern Shore in search of better economic opportunities. A generation of free blacks who migrated to Baltimore, Maryland and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania between 1810 and 1820

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.



were part of a much larger black migration from the Eastern Shore to points west of the Chesapeake Bay that began following the Revolutionary War.²⁷

IV. Slavery in Prince George's County

Southern Maryland held Maryland's largest black and slave population. Unlike areas of northern Maryland and the Eastern Shore, Southern Maryland did not abandon its reliance on slavery and tobacco production early on. Prince George's County, the home of the Plummer family, was a part of Southern Maryland. Prince George's County was established on April 23, 1696, out of land formerly belonging to Charles and Calvert Counties. Prince George's County, south of Baltimore and east of Washington, DC, typified lower Western Shore tobacco growing counties. Almost entirely rural, its relatively richer soils allowed the profitable cultivation of tobacco long after the crop had ceased to dominate Eastern Shore agriculture.²⁸

Tobacco was at the center of Prince George's County's economy. Slavery was a major institution in the county as a result of its dependence on tobacco. Slave owners frequently bred slaves to increase their labor supply. The investments that county

²⁷ Jennifer Hull Dorsey, "Free People of Color in Rural Maryland, 1783-1832." PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2002), 132.

²⁸ T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland*, 8.



residents made in slaves were protected from loss by the government. Often the government would pay for a purchased slave who was unable to work or became ill.²⁹

In Prince George's County, slaves were sold in markets at Upper Marlboro where they could be purchased in exchange for paper money, silver, tobacco or on credit. Bladensburg, a city in the county, was one of the East Coast's most thriving ports bustling with trade in tobacco, cotton, and slaves.³⁰ Wealthy families relied on tobacco production and slavery to maintain their riches. These families passed their fortunes down to their heirs.

By 1798, 790 slave owners resided in Prince George's County. The county was dominated by small farms, with the average farmer owning between one and twenty slaves. Planters possessing more than thirty slaves were likely to employ slave managers. County slaves worked on the tobacco fields sowing the seeds in the winter, harvesting crops in late summer and hanging the stalks in tobacco houses for curing during the fall.³¹

Adam Plummer's owner, George Calvert of Riversdale, owned nearly 10,000 acres of land. Calvert's parents, Benedict and Elisabeth Calvert of Mt. Airy plantation, left him the full benefit of the wealth they acquired through the enslavement of African people. The Mt. Airy plantation was located in Rosaryville State Park near Brandywine,

²⁹ Alvin Thornton and Karen Williams Gooden, *Like a Phoenix I'll Rise: An Illustrated History of African-Americans in Prince George's, Maryland – 1699-1996* (Virginia Beach: Donning, 1997), 35-36.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

³¹ Floyd, 17.



Maryland and included one of the county's largest slave populations. George Calvert's mother, Elisabeth (1730-1798), appears on the 1790 census as the owner of 228 slaves.³²

Similar to the Calverts, the Thomas Spriggs, Jr. family members were major land and slave owners in the county. The Spriggs family owned Northampton Plantation in Lake Arbor/Largo, Maryland. By 1810, they had 62 slaves on their plantation. The Fairview plantation in Collington, Maryland was another large plantation in the county. Fairview was owned by Governor Oden Bowie. Bowie was the last Prince George's County resident to be elected governor before Paris N. Glendening.

The number of slaves living in Southern Maryland increased at an annual rate of 3.7 percent a year between 1710 and 1755. During the first half of the century, foreign born slaves accounted for much of the slave population growth. Much of the large numbers of Africans coming to Maryland resided in Prince George's County. As the children of slave immigrants matured, the number of native black adult slaves rose. This natural process caused the total slave population to increase.³³

The growth rate of the black population had a direct correlation with the income and employment opportunities of poor whites. As the black population increased, the demand for slave labor declined. Wealthy planters owning more than enough slaves to grow tobacco, allowed their slaves to work as artisans. By 1733, nearly a fifth of all artisans in the county were slaves. Almost two-fifths of all artisans in the county were black in

³² Thornton and Gooden, 49.

³³ Kulikoff, 64, 85.



1776. As a result, poor whites lost jobs as artisans and migrated to northern Maryland to find work.³⁴

The slave population on the largest plantations increased from one-third in the 1730s and 1740s to one-half by the 1770s. Subsequently, the proportion of blacks living on farms of less than six slaves declined from one-fifth to one-tenth of all slaves. More blacks lived in separate quarters away from their master's supervision. As a result, blacks had more opportunity to associate with each other in their designated quarters.

Slave families were frequently separated as slaves were sold off to other plantations. Slaves learned to use these separations to build kinship networks across many plantations. Since Saturday evenings and Sundays were free time, most slaves used the time to visit family. Adam Francis Plummer used his weekends to visit his wife early in their marriage.³⁵ Slaves were also able to visit their friends and kinfolk on nearby plantations because whites built many miles of new roads over which blacks could travel.³⁶

V. The Anti-Slavery Movement and Freedom in Maryland

In 1783, the Maryland state legislature passed a law prohibiting the international slave trade. Maryland officially abolished slavery in November 1864.³⁷ Prior to

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 89-93.

³⁵ Plummer, 29.

³⁶ Kulikoff, 209.

³⁷ Fields, 1.



abolition, slaves in Maryland had been receiving their freedom for decades. In 1810, Maryland had the largest free black population. Throughout the nineteenth century the ratio of free blacks to slaves rose steadily. By 1840, Maryland's free population was 62,136. Only slave states in Latin America and the Caribbean were close to Maryland in the number of free blacks.

Free blacks and slaves regularly associated with each other during work and free time. In Prince George's County, the majority of free blacks lived in rural areas, in shanties on small plots of unwanted land. These pockets of free blacks became communities in the areas of Oxon Hill, Valley Lane and Rossville.³⁸ Many white slaveholders disliked the presence of free blacks. The slaveholders feared that free blacks would influence slaves to escape or revolt. Other whites believed free blacks took jobs away from poor whites. A law of 1832 designed to remove free blacks from the state, invited former slaves to renounce their freedom if the requirements of removal would otherwise separate them from slave relatives. Some also encouraged colonizing free blacks in Africa.

White planters, who did not mind free blacks, argued that free blacks provided valuable labor to non slaveholders and non slave owners. Eastern Shore residents opposed to slavery said the costs of maintaining slavery was higher than free labor. According to Anita Aidt Guy, they argued that European immigrants avoided settlement in Maryland because of "the lack of respect accorded free labor and the absence of

³⁸ Floyd, 19-20.



enough purchasable land since the slaveholders monopolized land ownership.”³⁹

Thousands of freed slaves and their freeborn children joined the Eastern Shore’s agricultural workforce as free laborers between 1790 and 1830. Former slaves in the Eastern Shore worked as agricultural workers and semi-skilled tradesmen, ultimately transforming the Shore from a plantation economy, which was dependent on slave labor, into a plantation economy, which was dependent on both slaves and a sizeable population of free black laborers.⁴⁰

Slaves in Maryland gained freedom through service in the union army during the Civil War, purchasing it with their own earned money, running away, being granted freedom in a master’s will, and from the courts. Manumission was the most common method used by slaves to gain freedom. Manumission occurred when slave masters granted their slaves freedom. Slaves could be manumitted by will or deed. By 1830, three-fourths of Baltimore’s blacks were free due to manumission.

Three religious groups were pivotal in Maryland’s anti-slavery movement: the Quakers, Nicholites, and Methodists. Quakers and Methodists were active in the Eastern Shore and Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Hartford, and Frederick Counties. Quakers began abolition efforts in the 1760s. Attempts to eliminate slavery outright among the membership met resistance until 1777. By 1783, the majority of Quakers had manumitted their slaves. The drive to free slaves was based on moral grounds. The Quakers’ activity set a model for the entire state by (1) establishing an organization that

³⁹ Anita Aids Guy, *Maryland’s Persistent Pursuit to End Slavery, 1850 – 1864* (NY: Routledge, 1997), 5.

⁴⁰ Dorsey, 1.



could carry out the manumission process, (2) proving that manumission was simple and inexpensive, and (3) proving that slaves could adjust to freedom.⁴¹ Quaker opposition to slavery served as an example to their Eastern Shore neighbors, the Nicholites and the Methodists. The Nicholites began freeing slaves in the late 1760s. They were few in numbers and their impact on manumission was not as great as that of the Quakers and the Methodists. The Methodists became the dominant religious force in much of the Eastern Shore. The Methodists allowed blacks to worship with whites and took the lead in giving blacks religious instruction.⁴²

The Quakers sponsored a series of petitions from ten Maryland counties proposing that the state adopt a plan of gradual emancipation. The House of Delegates voted down the petitions by a close margin of thirty-two to twenty-two. By 1789, the issue had progressed in Maryland where serious plans for gradual manumission were being discussed. One plan called for all female children (ages seven to fourteen) to be purchased by the state, serve as apprentices until twenty-five and then be granted full freedom. Another plan called for the emancipation of all slave children at a stipulated age and directed the courts to apprentice them out in the interval.⁴³ The religious teachings of these groups combined with the spirit of liberty coming from the American Revolution influenced much of Maryland's manumission.

⁴¹ William Calderhead, "Slavery in Maryland in the Age of the Revolution, 1775-1790," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 98, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 305.

⁴² James M. Wright, *The Free Negro in Maryland, 1634-1860* (NY: Columbia University, 1971), 200.

⁴³ Calderhead, 306.



In 1820, there were 1,096 free blacks living in Prince George's County. The largest number resided in the Vansville Election District in the northern sector of the county. By 1860, the number of free blacks in Prince George's County totaled 1,198. In the county, free blacks often established schools and churches.⁴⁴ The Freedmen's Bureau constructed the first school for Prince George's County blacks in Bladensburg. The second school was opened in Upper Marlboro.

Former slaves and free blacks in Prince George's County registered to vote during the Reconstruction (1865-1877). Approximately 1,500 black voters in Maryland resided in Prince George's County in 1870.⁴⁵

The Plummer family took full advantage of emancipation. Adam Francis Plummer's eldest daughter, Sarah Miranda, was taken from Washington to Virginia and later sold to a New Orleans slaveholder in 1860. Following emancipation, the Plummer's son traveled to New Orleans to get Sarah Miranda and reunite her with the family.⁴⁶

Nellie Arnold Plummer, Adam Francis's youngest daughter and the author of *Out of the Depths or The Triumph of the Cross*, attended the Normal Department of Wayland Seminary in Washington, DC from 1875 to 1878 as its first female student. She later became a teacher in Forestville, Maryland, and Washington, DC. She served as an educator for over forty-five years.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Floyd, 20-23.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁶ Julia Oliver, "Retracing Plummer Roots," *Gazette Community News*, June 28, 2001, sec. A.

⁴⁷ Plummer, xx.



In conclusion, slavery's influence on Maryland's economy, industry, population growth, and culture cannot be ignored. The experiences of most African-Americans living in Maryland, particularly Prince George's County, will always be linked directly or indirectly to slavery. The Plummer family is one example of the experiences, hardships, challenges, and triumphs that blacks in Prince Georges County, Maryland lived through during the early years of the state's history.



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